N.J. Native Americans - (Philhower articles)

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Jersey Indians utilized natural caves such as this while away from their wigwam villages on hunting trips. Note stone mortar and pestle used for grinding corn.

LIFE AROUND THE WIGWAM

BY CHARLES A. PHILHOWER

THE Indians who once inhabited New Jersey apparently were vain creatures who not only painted their bodies and faces with crude cosmetics but also wore strings of beads and fancy hairdos.

But it was the men and not the women who so adorned themselves the most in those days. The women contented themselves with long hair held together in back with a stone pin given to them as a wedding gift by their braves. A few wore beads and some carried a fur scarf in the Winter to keep them warm. Only on special festive occasions did the women attempt to improve upon their natural beauty.

While there were some minor distinguishing characteristics of members of the Lenape subtribes, these Jersey Indians were in the main much alike in features and customs. The Munsees were principally known by their hair which grew low on the forehead. They were rather short in stature, with angular facial features and broad shoulders. The Unamis and Unalachtigos had long, oval heads. They were taller than the Munsees. All had jet black, coarse hair.

The earliest account of the aborigines in Central Jersey comes from Verrazzano, a Florentine navigator on an English ship. He described the fine physique of the Lenapes and told of their bodies being covered with nothing but deer skin. They wore no covering on their heads, he reported, and their long h[illegible] ga[illegible]hered together in the back and tied in knots. The important men had strings of beads of various colors about their necks. Their eyes were sparkling black and their countenances calm and pleasant.

VERRAZZANO depicted the Indian women as very handsome and "well favored." They also wore only a deer skin about their bodies and often carried a very rich fur on the arm which would be at times thrown over the shoulders. Their hair was adorned with beads and often hung down in front over their breasts. Squaws ordinarily wore their hair long and much disheveled. Some would treat their hair with bear's fat, braid it, and tie it up in back with a gorget or ornamental stone given to them by their braves. Bands of beads were worn about the forehead.

Braves would burn or cut off their hair with flints except for a tuft at the top which, at times, would reach down their backs to the knees. Rarely there would be three or four of these scalp locks. Others in cutting the hair would leave a roach that would extend from the brow over the head to the back of the skull. The hair in front was cut down to bristles while in the back the growth would sometimes reach the waist. Each tuft was braided or tied together and decorated with one or more large eagle feathers. Shell beads threaded on sinew ornamented the ends of these shocks of hair. Parts of the scalp devoid of hair were painted red. This, with the tattooing on the face, gave the individual a gruesome appearance.

Tattooing was extensively practiced. It will be observed that Lappawinso has a snake with two birds flying at it tattooed on his forehead. Note also the two lines that cut downward across the cheek opposite the left corner of the mouth. These decorations were indicative of distinction attained in the hunt or on the war path. The act of tattooing was accompanied with a ceremony. The subject lay supine on the ground and the medicine man danced with incantations while the operation was performed. Special individuals adept in the art did the tattooing with charcoal or dyes. The pricking was done with thorns, sharp flakes of flint or the spines of fish fins, especially those taken from the head of catfish. Certain skeletal bones of fish were also used. The color was energetically rubbed in and protected with grease until healing was complete.

THE statement that Indians had no beards is decidedly questionable. Most Indians had some hair on the face, and a common practice was to pull it out with two flakes of flint used as tweezers. Tishcohan had a prominent goatee. Most Indians were very adept at painting their faces for the war path and for the dance. Heckewelder tells of his visit with White Eye on the Muskingun in Ohio at a time when he was getting ready for a ceremonial dance. He found him alone in his wigwam painting his face with pigments. Sticks and brushes were about him but no looking glass. When he had made himself ready, Heckewelder was astonished with the product. Looking straight forward his face had the appearance of a snarling wolf. With a sudden turn to the left, the right view of the face presented a fierce eagle, and with a turn to the right, the left side showed an open mouth with the cutting teeth of a wall-eyed pike.

BEAVER skin also was a common article of dress for both men and women. This fur was worn on the inside in Winter and on the outside in Summer. Footwear for the Lenape was a skipack, a neatly closely braided corn husk moccasin. When a girl came of marriageable age she made for herself a beautiful dress made from the large wing and tail feathers of the wild turkey. These were overlapped and worked together into a garment so that the striking color and design of the ends of the feathers decorated the bride-to-be. Clothed in this gown, she would sit with a chaperone along the trail nearest to her wigwam. With covered head she awaited a signal from her discriminating companion when an eligible brave appeared. She would look at him and he at her. If what each saw was satisfactory [illegible] acquaintanceship [illegible]ould go low.

This is the sixth in a series of articles about the Indians who once populated this state, written especially for The Newark Sunday News Magazine by Charles A. Philhower, authority on Indian lore. In subsequent articles Mr. Philhower will tell how the Lenni Lenape tribes governed themselves and left their influence on New Jersey.

An Indian child watches as his father fashions arrow heads out of stone at Bevan's Rock Shelter in Sussex County. Hunter in background has a dead deer slung on back.

off on their way of life together.

THE shelters of the Indian along the Atlantic coast should not be confused with the tepees of the plains. The tepee was adapted to wind-swept flat lands. Its inverted cone could be set up and taken down quickly and the poles and skins could be used as drags. The Lenape woodland people lived in a wigwam, a house about three times the length of its width, made of sticks set in the ground about 30 inches apart opposite each other and bent over at the top to make a vaulted roof. Four pairs of these supports made up the framework of the house. There were cross bars on the sides and a covering of chestnut bark overlapping like weather boards.

Skins and grass matting also were used as coverings. Shocks of cornstalks were braced against the outside in order to make the area over the ground floor warmer. There was a pit fire in the center of the floor with a hole in the roof directly above to emit the smoke. Low platforms built lengthwise along the sides provided sleeping conveniences.

Food supplies for Winter, especially charred corn mixed with bear's fat, were put in pots and buried in storage pits. Corn on the ear was often cribbed in shelters built up off the ground. The rail corn crib of the pioneer days was an imitation of these shelters. Corn was shelled with the side teeth of a deer's jaw, crushed with a stone pestle in a wooden mortar and boiled in water with animal fat. This was called suppan, the hasty pudding or mush of the early white settler's evening meal. Squash were stored in the wigwam and became a part of the "potlick" as the squaws were disposed to use them. Cooking pots had pointed bottoms, were set in depressions in the sand and a fire was built around them.

A GRAVE responsibility of the squaw was to keep the pot boiling. This was necessary in order that any hungry person or unexpected visitor could be fed. In feeding himself the individual would go to the pot with a wooden bowl and ladle, sometimes a calabash, dip a portion from the pot and eat with moderation. No one "ate his fill." That would have been bad manners which would not have been tolerated. The Indians had so little to eat that they were forced to share carefully.

Indian hospitality demanded food for all strangers reaching the camp. Two Dutch missionaries, Peter Sluyter and Jasper Dankers, experienced this practice. On the Millstone River in the vicinity of Kingston they came upon an Indian. They asked him if he had a canoe to take them across the river, which was very high. He said he did not, but that some distance away lived a "sack-maker" who had a canoe with which he had taken a man across the day before. Without invitation, the Indian picked up their sacks, put them on his shoulder and led off. When they came to the Indian's wigwam they were given some boiled beans in a calabash cooked without salt or grease. The squaw offered them also a piece of their bread which was made of pounded maize kneaded into a cake and baked under hot ashes.

A village of average size would have eight to a dozen wigwams. When a bear, a deer or an elk was killed there was great rejoicing and it was shared as far as the prize would go. Dispatching a bear or elk always was a notable event. The killing of a deer was not so difficult and on digging in feast pits the bones of deer are often found while bear bones and elk bones are rather unusual. There were seldom, if ever, outright kills with a bow and arrow. The hunter would usually wound the animal and then dispatch the beast with his club. About the camp, beaver fur for clothing and beaver meat for food was always in evidence. Beavers were common and since they were active all Winter could easily be taken. When the animal came out to feed, the Indian hunter would head him off from his retreat and kill him with a club. Getting beaver was usually the responsibility of old men and boys.

THREE important commodities about the Indian village were corn, beans and tobacco. The Indians said in the beginning the only food they had was the flesh of animals and the time came when tney longed for something else to eat. The story was told that two young braves

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Bevan's Rock Shelter (above) as it is today. The late William Armstrong (below) of Frelinghuysen Township found a number of Indian relics in this natural rock shelter on his farm in Warren County.

JERSEY INDIANS

(Cont'd from Preceding Page)

on the hunt took a large buck deer. They skinned the animal, dressed him, and cooked the meat for a good feast. While they were eating some distance away an attractive young squaw came down from the heavens and looked longingly as if she, too, would like some deer meat.

One brave said to the other, "She is a spirit come from the happy hunting ground. Let us offer her meat to eat."

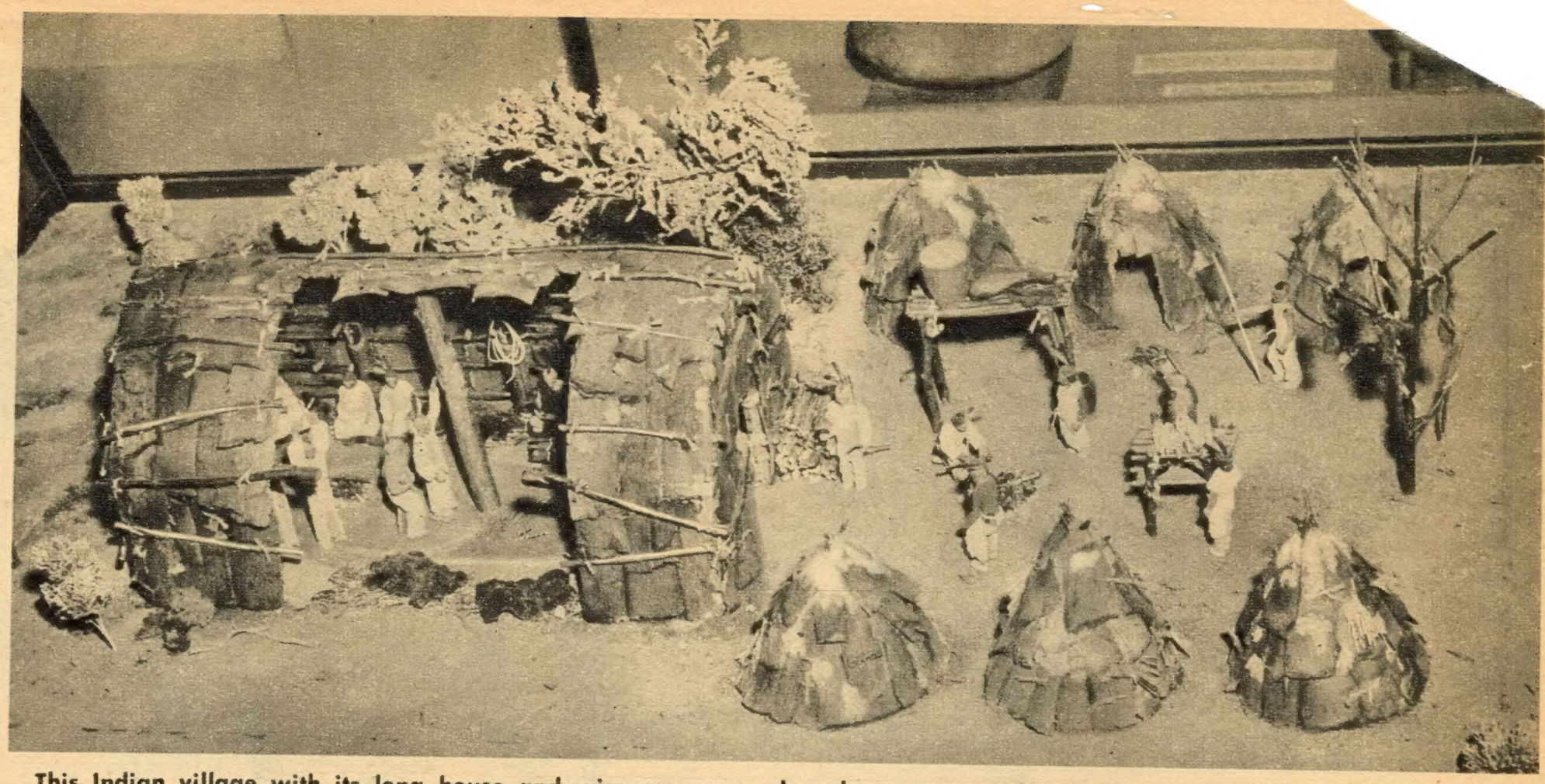
Then the question arose, "What part of the deer shall it be?"

After considerable thought they decided to give her the tongue. This they did and she was greatly pleased.

When she left, she said: "You shall be rewarded for your thoughtfulness. After 13 moons come to this place and you shall find something that will be of great use to you and your people."

At the appointed time they returned and to their great surprise found three plants which they and even their wise men had never seen before. Where her left hand touched the ground, there grew beans, where her right hand touched the ground, there grew [illegible] and where she sat, there grew tobacco.

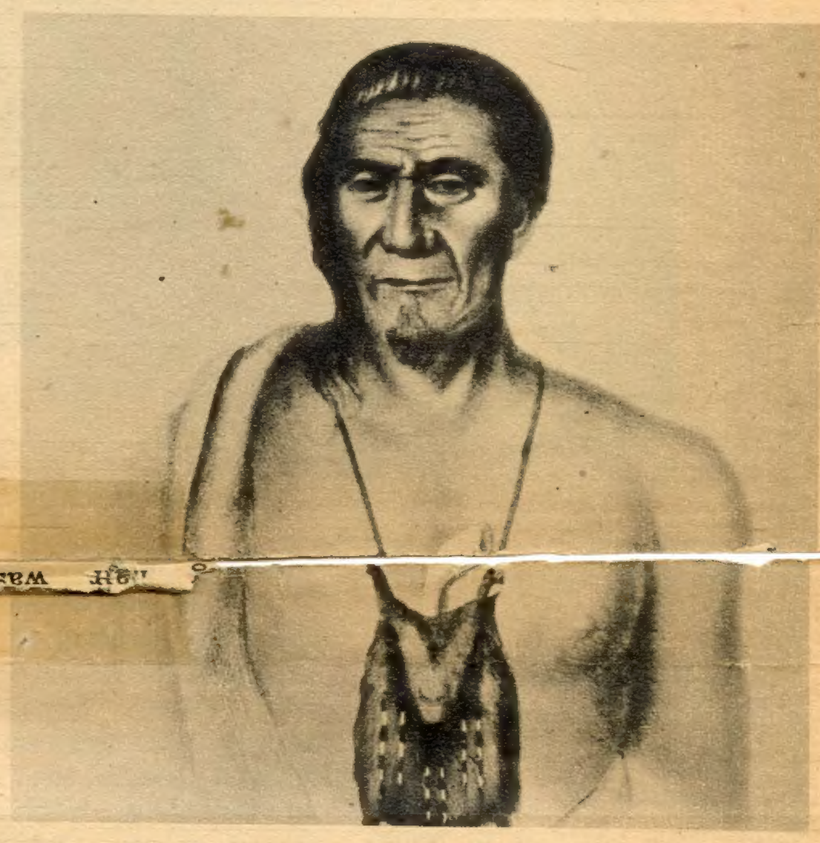
NEXT WEEK—How the Indians conversed and left the impression of their language on New Jersey.

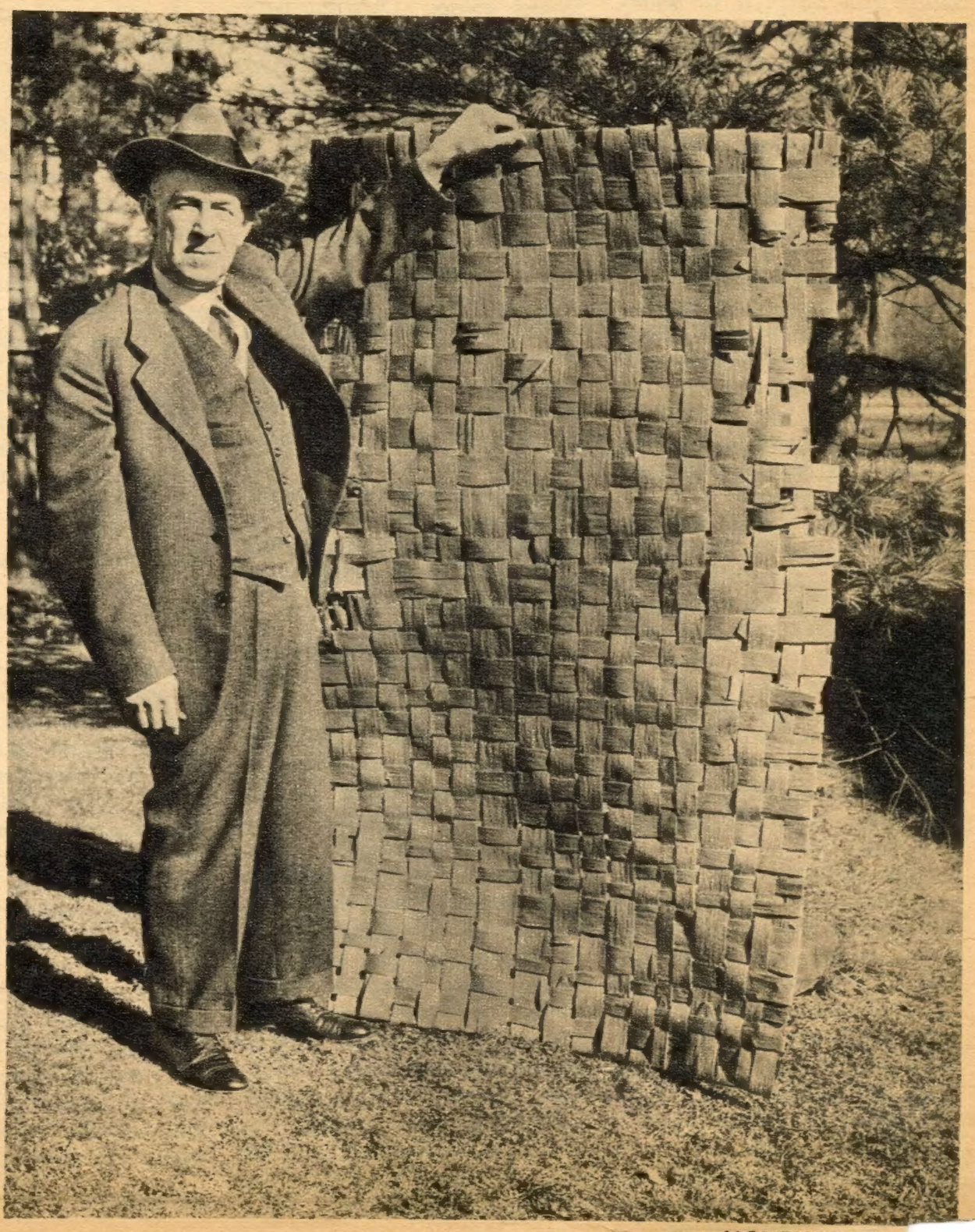


This Indian village with its long house and wigwams was typical of community in which Lenni Lenape lived. The long house was used as common meeting place where ceremonies were held and tribe congregated in Winter months.

LEFT: The Lenni Lenapes tattooed snakes and birds on faces as did the great Chief Lappawinso of the Delaware tribes.

RIGHT: Chief Tisho[illegible] sported a goatee despite a common belief Indians had no beards. Note animal skin pouch.





ABOVE: Corn husks provided material for the Lenape ceremonial mask and the skipack, a closely braided moccasin. RIGHT: Charles A. Philhower, author of this series, with sleeping mat made of bark strips.

Dioramas on these pages are at Trenton State Museum.